Chapter 2 - “Who are we?”: Individual identity

“I have gained so much from the art experiences we all took part in. By this I mean the closeness and sharing of teacher learning and getting to know our passions and interests. This has continued throughout as we respect our differences and talents in our professional working day.” (Christina Taylor, teacher researcher)

Introduction

This chapter presents findings that illustrate the strengthening of individual identity for members of our community: teachers, parents/whanau and children. In the first section of this chapter, we describe how understandings about parent identity emerged from insights gained through a parent survey. Parental perspectives strongly influenced the teacher researchers’ view of their parent community and as a result parents became valued and acknowledged as individuals rather than seen as a group of people with common characteristics. The second section of this chapter tells how teachers brought the notion of individual identity (child, parent and teacher) into current learning and teaching documentation practices and, in so doing, strengthened their understandings of socio-cultural learning theory. The concluding section describes the emergence of an identity of individuals in this learning community as co-learners; adults and children sharing the roles of teacher and learner. This understanding emerged as teachers firstly questioned difference in pedagogical approaches in visual art. Through developing teacher confidence and capability in working in visual art with children, teachers gained a positive view of themselves as learners in this domain and community participation in visual art strengthened. One teacher’s story is shared as an example of the process teachers experienced in coming to know oneself as a learner and teacher.

The outcome of this area of exploration is presented as a framework that describes the image of a co-learner in visual art. The identity of the co-learner is described as:

- An explorer,
- An achiever,
- A participator, facilitator, contributor,
- A dreamer and player, and
- A communicator.
**Individual identity**

The placement of this chapter early in this research report reflects how significant acknowledgement of individual identity has been to this research journey, as evidenced in the title of the report. The I in “communIty” can refer to I for individual as well as I for identity.

This research is based on particular assumptions about the way identity is created and understood: that is, that identity relates to who we are, defined through our lived experiences and interactions - how we live from day to day. Developing an understanding of identity of individuals, parents, children and teachers, was a critical influence on teacher practice and in turn on participation in the community.

**Influence 2.1: Wenger (1998) - Communities of practice**

Wenger (1998) suggests that identity is the way we define who we are through a layering of events of participation and reification. Identity emerges in the ways our experience and its social interpretation inform each other; it is an ever evolving concept. Identity differs from self image, as

> 'who we are lies in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves, although that is of course part (but only part) of the way we live' (p. 151).

Identity is something we internalise; our actions and behaviours are manifestations of how we view ourselves and how we view others. Teachers at New Beginnings Preschool came to understand how the perception they hold of themselves and the people in the community (or the way they define others) influences their practice and in turn influences how people participate in their community. This journey to understanding will be illustrated through the use of the three diagrams previously presented in chapter 1 of this report. The diagrams illustrate a shift firstly from identity as a group member to identity as an individual within a group, and finally individual identity as a co-learner, a capable and competent member of the community.

Participating in research that focused on teacher practice contributed to teachers strengthening their individual personal and professional identity and also their view of capable, competent others: colleagues, parents/whanau and children. Teachers developed an identity of themselves as teachers and learners that generated understanding of what it means to be a *co-learner*. The term *co-learner* describes a relationship in which teaching and learning is a venture shared among participants, where responsibility and expertise are fluidly shared. That is, no one participant retains power in the relationship.
Influence 2.2: Jordon (2004) - Co-construction

Our definition of a co-learner has been influenced by Jordan’s (2004) description of the co-construction metaphor, one in which she describes co-construction as a process of constructing with others. Co-construction places emphasis on teachers and children together studying meanings. Co-learner is the name we have given to any partner in the co-construction process.

The identity of parents as participants

As teacher researchers began this research project they held very strong views of their community as a social setting in which joint participation by parents/whanau, children and teachers in children’s learning could occur. At this time participants in the community were described by teachers as groups of parents, teachers and children as the first exhibit (2.1) depicts.

Exhibit 2.1: Three groups of participants

Teachers viewed themselves at that time as a collaborative group responsible for planning and preparing the learning environment, for ensuring parents were kept informed of children’s everyday experiences and for supporting children’s participation and learning. The groups of children and parents/whanau were viewed by teachers according to assumptions about their position in the community. For example, children were the learners, teachers the teachers, and parents could choose to be bystanders, participants or contributors.

Building parental participation in children’s learning was an initial goal for the teacher researcher team. This aspect of the research is described in more detail in chapter 3. In this chapter we highlight one of the outcomes of this research cycle, recognition by teachers of all parents as interested and willing participants in their children’s learning. Teachers came to view parents as individuals, each interested and willing to participate in ways that they chose.
Changing views on parental participation

Many parents were already viewed as active participants in centre life. Teachers had identified participating parents as those who joined in centre events, contributed resources and expertise, spent time in discussions with teachers, read documentation displays or their child’s profile books or took them home, as well as those who were members of the management committee. What the teacher researcher team discovered is that participation is not always visible in the centre. Previous assumptions held about those parents not visible in the centre as being not interested were challenged as teachers discovered how participation looks different for individuals at different times.

Listening to the perspectives parents offered in a parent survey contributed to teacher learning in this area.

Research process 2.1: Surveying parent opinion

A parent survey was distributed to a total of seventy-six families who had children attending the centre at that time. The purpose of the survey was to gather information from parents about the value of the documentation in children’s profile books and to elicit parent perspectives about building relationships and participation in the centre. Thirty-seven surveys (almost 50%) were completed and returned. While the response rate was lower than expected, it was significant in that a large number of the responses came from parents who were not previously represented in research data. Previous activity involved recording an overview of the families who were actively participating in their children’s learning at the centre. Prior to the parent survey 57% of the families had been identified as active participants. Of the parent survey responses, thirteen (35% of the total) were from parents who were not represented in our data. Another twelve (32.5%) were from parents who had limited previous involvement. The remaining 32.5% represent parents who are actively involved.

The survey was collated and distributed to the teacher researcher team to individually reflect on prior to participating in a team meeting where discussion and analysis occurred.

The responses to three questions in particular provided the teacher researcher team insight into how parents view themselves in their relationship with the centre. The first question asked ‘How do you feel about contributing information from home to your child’s profile book?’ This had been a recent addition to profile book practices. Teachers were looking for feedback on whether it was a practice that was equally valued by parents and teachers.

Overall, parents enthusiastically supported the practice. Parents reinforced teacher beliefs that contextual information about children is essential to supporting children’s learning. E.g. “a great way to keep the information flowing and helps both parties to make important links and decisions”; “it’s great because every day (child) learns new things and if we all know it’s easier to keep it going”; “I think it’s good to bring in things from home, it shows interest coming from the parents in what the kids are doing”; “if I can help my child in any way, I’m in!”
These responses validated parents as interested participants in their child’s learning. Parents clearly indicated that not only are they interested but they also assume responsibility for supporting their children’s learning at the centre. Teachers could let go of any reservation held about their expectations of parents to contribute to children’s teaching and learning. While parental contribution was not always evident within the centre, it was occurring at home.

**Parents are partners**

The identity of parents as willing partners in children’s learning was made visible to teachers through the responses to the second question ‘*What are your views about the parent role and the teacher’s role in our centre?’* This question attracted the largest amount of parental response. Three key messages summed up the views of parents.

1. Teachers and parents share a dual role in children’s education. Many commented on how they believe parents and children need to work together for the child’s benefit. E.g. “*I feel it is important to try to integrate roles and relationships between the two if possible. It’s good for the child to experience a bit of home at preschool and vice versa*”; “*the teacher’s role is to encourage at preschool and the parent’s role is to continue to encourage at home. Both (need to) keep the communication open between the two and discover how best for the child to learn.*” It was clearly evident that parents value the connectedness of centre and home as being important in supporting children’s learning.

2. The parent’s role is to support teachers. Parents spoke of how they help teachers by sharing information and becoming involved in centre activity when they choose to. There was also some acknowledgement of how they support teachers by supporting their child at home, “*I believe that children need their parents to support and encourage their work at the centre – if mum/dad are excited and interested it enables the kids to be free with their imagination.*”

3. The teacher’s role is to support parents. Parents discussed how they learn from teachers and appreciate the expertise they bring to the relationship. As one parent explained, “*the teacher’s role is to not only help parents teach the children but to teach the parents as well.*”

Parents in this community presented the view of an interdependent relationship with teachers. They see the two sets of adults as complementary. Parents offered a view of themselves as teachers as well as learners in their relationship with the centre. The traditional view of teachers in the centre as experts did not predominate; the comments were suggestive of parents viewing themselves as co-learning partners.
Parents are active participants

The responses from the third question ‘How do you use the profile book when you take it home?’ significantly contributed to teacher researcher’s understandings of parent participation. The following summarizes the ways children’s profiles books were used by parents:

1. Parents use the information to inform them of their child’s learning and development and the progress they are making. E.g. “I read it so I know what new things my boy’s learnt”; “look back on how much (child) has achieved over the past year”; “By reading it I am able to catch up on (child’s) progress – this is especially important to me as I am not there very often.”

2. The profile books are used to celebrate the child with family, whanau, friends and others. E.g. “We look through it together, (child) and I. I share it with my family and where appropriate, my friends. I like to show off my baby”; “I show it to my son’s family (Grandma, dad etc.)”; “I show it to friends and family.”

3. They provide the basis of discussion between families and their child. The types of discussions described indicated that children revisit and consolidate their learning experiences and participate in self-assessment with their parent/family. E.g. “we read it as a family then talk about what the photos are about and her drawings and pictures. We try to answer her questions and explain what the letters are about”; “show dad and go through them with the children and ask them what they think is happening in the picture.”

4. Parents use the information to keep them current with their child’s project interests at the centre so they can support their child’s participation. E.g. “…look at the new project they are currently doing and encourage them to talk about it.”

5. Parents use the profile book as a link between centre and home to provide continuity in experiences. E.g. “(I) try to think of ways to further their learning skills – keep it going at home as well as preschool”; “I might write about things the children like to do at home, holiday pages, notes on general development or experiences that relate to projects.”

Parent participation took on new meaning as teachers reflected on these parents’ comments. Participation was occurring in ways that teachers had previously been unaware of. Children’s profile books acted as a vehicle for home/centre communication as well as a tool that supported participation of the wider community, children, family/whanau and friends.

It was important to the teacher researcher team that the opinions offered in the survey included those from many parents who were previously considered non-participants (or not interested). The
understandings gained through these responses contributed to teachers revising their image of the parents to one of equitable partners in the community.

A shift in the image of parents/whanau

Teachers acknowledged that their view of parent participants in the community had shifted from one that assumed some were interested while others weren’t, to an understanding that all parents were willing and interested partners. Through the survey parents contributed a view of themselves as willing and interested participants in the learning community. Teachers discovered that parental participation occurs beyond the walls of the centre, and that participation looks different for different people at different times. Parents described how they supported their child’s learning and they provided an image of themselves as co-learning partners. This challenged teachers’ prior assumptions that some parents were disinterested or not willing to be involved. Teacher practice responded to the shift in image of parents by further developing communication practices to invite participation in children’s learning and provide individual choice in pathways to participate. This aspect of the research is described fully in Chapter 3 – Doing the hard work, building relationships.

This early research process involved teachers challenging previously held assumptions and definitions of the differing groups of participants. Exhibit 2.2 illustrates the shifting image of individuals in the community. The boundaries around each group were broken down as individuals became valued for who they are, empowered to contribute and participate through their own choice and in their own way.

| Exhibit 2.2: The first evolution – viewing individuals |
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Sharpening the focus on individuals within the group context

From the beginning of this research project the teacher researcher team articulated a strong belief in children as competent and capable learners. This view had shaped teacher practice in implementing a project approach to the curriculum. Teachers had developed documentation practices to capture the continuity in children’s learning that occurs through engagement in project work. Alongside this documentation teachers also collected learning stories of children involved in other aspects of the centre programme. A convergence in the action research cycles occurred at this point as investigations into parental participation connected with investigations into project work. Documentation of children’s learning was the common factor. On reflection, teachers identified that they were documenting children’s learning in two distinctly different ways, one as an individual child in the regular programme and the other as a group participant in project work. Participation in project work was documented as a group experience, describing and discussing learning as if all participants were gaining similar outcomes, whereas participation in other aspects of the programme was documented as an individual experience with individual learning highlighted. In Chapter 3, the impact of this discovery and teacher learning about documenting individual children’s learning is further described. In this chapter we focus attention on how teachers developed ways to sharpen their focus on individual learning within a group-learning context, and in so doing developed an understanding of ‘learning as a transformation of participation’ (Rogoff, 2003).

Individuals within social learning theory

Placing a focus on individual children within a social learning context posed a dilemma for teachers. Prior to 2002, centre documentation practice had been heavily influenced by developmental views of learning, where individuals were observed and assessed in isolation from the social context of the centre. Concern raised by the team was that there could be a tendency to revert to the previous ‘developmental’ flavour of writing if they began to write solely about individuals involved in group projects. The team needed an alternative approach. Prior discussions about the use of Barbara Rogoff’s (2003) three analytical lenses provided a possible tool for teachers to use that would enable them to focus on individuals while retaining the complete ‘picture’ of the teaching and learning experience. The team decided to revisit this idea.

Influence 2.3: Rogoff (2003) Three foci of analysis

Rogoff (2003) proposes three foci for analysis of socio-cultural activity, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Cultural-institutional. Together the three foci for analysis (or lenses) constitute the experience: no aspect can be studied in isolation from the other. Analysis of interpersonal relationships would not be able to occur without information about the context in which they are working. At the same time attention is paid to personal processes occurring within the
experience. The observer is also important because the focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine. “The distinction between what we choose to foreground or background lies in our analysis, and is not assumed to be a separate entity in reality.” (Rogoff, ibid).

Intrapersonal lens: the individual is the focus of analysis with interpersonal and cultural institutional information available in the background.

Interpersonal lens: the focus is on what people are doing together, the role they play and the relationships among them. A sense of individual and cultural information is needed to understand what the people are doing.

Cultural/institutional lens: the focus is on cultural institutional processes such as: how practices develop and why, how practices connect with the culture and history and how they evolve. Detail about particular people and their relations with each other are back-grounded.

The use of the three lenses in the ‘recognize’ phase of learning and teaching stories offered teachers a way to discuss the significance of an individual child’s learning in more depth while at the same time acknowledging the influences among the individual, relationships and the learning context.

Teachers decided to trial this form of analysis in their documentation of ongoing learning and teaching stories. Through the use of the three lenses for analysis of socio-cultural activity teachers found they could foreground individual children’s learning while at the same time keep their eyes on influential factors such as relationships and centre practices.

Influence 2.4: Carr (1998) Learning stories

Learning Stories as an assessment framework was introduced to the early childhood sector as a result of Margaret Carr’s (1998) research project “Assessing Children's Experiences in early Childhood.” ‘Learning Stories’ are structured narratives that track children’s strengths and interests: they emphasize the aim of early childhood as the development of children’s identities as competent learners in a range of different arenas” (Cowie & Carr, 2005. p.97).

Assessment in a learning story involves a formative process in which learning is noticed, recognized and responded to. In the documentation the learning occasion is described (notice), analyzed (recognize), and followed by an indication of how teachers may act on this (respond) to further support the child’s learning. The stories form the basis for discussion among teachers, teachers and parents/whānau and children. Involvement and contribution of all participants is actively invited throughout the process.

The following story is an example of how teachers’ use of the three lenses for analysis enables one child’s learning, or transformation of participation, to be fore-grounded. Michael’s story illustrates the way the three lenses were incorporated into the existing narrative style of documentation. In telling his story it will be seen that all three lenses remain in view to provide the full picture. The story gives information about him (intrapersonal lens) while at the same time, information available in the background includes other people he is working with (interpersonal lens) and the context he is learning within (contextual/institutional lens).
Michael’s story
Written by Debbie: 2004 - 2005

Michael has been involved in a project called ‘above and below the sea’. A number of children and their families had been visiting the beach to collect resources to contribute toward the children’s investigations. Debbie, as one of the teachers, recorded an occasion when she saw Michael and his grandmother in the car park of the centre.

**Michael’s learning story (1a)**

“I heard him talking with his grandmother about going to the beach. Of course my ears perked up – great, more connections being made to our project focus. I talked with Michael and his grandmother about how great it would be for them to find ‘unusual’ things on the beach. They both went off chatting amongst themselves about their trip to the beach. The next time I saw Michael was with his Mum, they both came and found Katrina and myself to show us the things that Michael and his grandmother had collected on their trip to the beach. In came Michael with a box that was almost too big for him to carry – he very proudly put the box down, and Katrina and I started to look through the things that he had picked up. There were large pieces of seaweed, pods, shells, driftwood, crab shells and normal ‘beach treasures’. Then there were some unusual things that no one else had brought in so far – sea sponge, shells with hair growing out of them, and beach flowers! We asked Michael if he wanted to bring them in to group time and he said yes. We talked about a safe place to store them until then, and decided on the top of the lockers.” (Debbie, August 04)

As teachers, our prior knowledge of Michael was that he had not as yet contributed resources towards the development of a project. He seemed to sit on the periphery of the group time activities and was very quiet when encouraged to contribute to group conversations. His mother also seemed to ‘sit on the periphery’ in her knowledge about the regular cultural practices of the group time. So it was with some surprise and delight when Michael and his mum proudly produced the ‘treasures’ that Michael and his grandmother had collected from their beach trip.
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Michael’s learning story (1b)

Group time came and we were all excited by this big box that Michael had behind him when he was sitting down. I asked if anyone had brought anything to do with our project and Michael said that he did. We put the box in the middle and bit-by-bit I started taking things out of the box, and as I did I asked the children if they knew the names of the different natural beach resources. Out came the seaweed, shells, crab shells — all the children quickly named these items. The seaweed with the pods came out, and with a little encouragement Michael was also able to name the pod. It started to get a bit tricky though when I pulled out the sea sponge — but it didn’t take one child long to call it a sponge — the children all had to take their turn in holding the sponge, unfortunately it got broken up slightly. Michael seemed to take this very well, considering how proud he was of his treasures! The children were amazed by the beach flowers! The discussion amongst the group flowed throughout the group time — all because of Michael’s trip to the beach with his grandmother and the ‘treasure’ they both found together (Debbie, August 2004)

What happened to all those ‘treasures’ Michael collected from the beach? The story continues…

Michael’s learning story (1c)

During the group time the resources were all displayed on the floor in the middle of the group. After group time finished we wanted to leave them on display. It was the end of the day and Michael wanted to take all his treasures home again. Mum wanted him to keep some at the centre and so we both encouraged him to just choose a few special things to take home. I got a plastic bag and then Michael chose a few special things that Mum was saying could either go around some pot plants, in the garden, or better still — make a display in the house. Michael was very satisfied with the items he chose and went away very happily. (Debbie, August 04)

This story was added to Michael’s profile book with the addition of a question for Corrina, “What happened to the ‘beach treasures’ once Michael and you got home?”

Corrina, Michael’s mother, responds by writing in Michael’s profile book.

Michael’s story (1d)

“When we finally got around to it we put the goodies from the beach into a big blue pot that we have outside by the garage. In the pot we have pansies and daffodils growing. It is decorated with shells and driftwood. I must say Michael didn’t want to know much about this
probably because it took a week to do, and dad decided to fix the car at the same time I did this. So the beach lost, and fixing cars won! However I would definitely say Michael really enjoyed his beach project.” Cheers. Corrina

His grandmother was also asked if she would tell the story of going to the beach with Michael. She also wrote in his profile book.

Michael’s story (1e)

After picking up Michael from the centre we came home and sat out on the deck where Michael had fish and chips and a doughnut, with a drink for lunch, then we went across to the beach to find some ‘goodies’ for Michael’s project. Michael really talked my ears off with. “We’ll go to the beach, eh Nan… Look Nan a crab!... There’s a stick Nan!” On arriving at the beach though Michael’s first sentence was…. “We won’t go down there though will we Nan?” Michael was pointing to where the surf was breaking, for some reason Michael does not like the sea, although he does enjoy playing in the sand. It was a great day weather wise, and both Michael and I had a lot of fun that day on the beach. (Michael’s grandmother, August 04)

In Michael’s story we can see that there have been many opportunities for the project to be discussed between Michael and his mother, grandmother, teachers, and other children in his group. Every time each person discusses it with Michael his understanding of the project grows. Michael’s family trip to the beach was an example of how joint participation with people he trusted has supported him to develop confidence to participate in other social settings, as well as developing his understandings even further. Michael’s confidence to participate and contribute to group-time discussions significantly developed during this project. Michael’s development could not be attributed to his participation in the centre alone. He benefited from continuity in his experiences between home and centre. Michael brought the results of those interactions into the group work in the centre; all experienced change and learning as a result, and Michael showed increased level of participation and self-confidence.

The use of Rogoff’s three lenses for analysis proved to be an effective tool in supporting teachers to strengthen their understanding of a socio-cultural view of teaching and learning. Changes they made to documentation were reflective of this. The teacher researcher team developed a sequence of photographs based on Michael’s experience to visually represent the way in which they background and foreground the focus of interest when documenting stories.
Individual children’s learning is noticed and celebrated without being disconnected from the social context of the centre. Teachers gained a greater appreciation of the ways in which centre practice, relationships and individual participation are mutually creating each other. The ways in which Michael’s participation in this project was documented enabled teachers to focus on his learning as well as acknowledging supporting relationships and influences.

**Michael’s Transformation of Participation comes into view.**

Teacher awareness of Michael’s developing confidence to participate and his emerging enthusiasm for learning in relation to a project influenced the choice of the next centre project focus. Michael was provided the opportunity to consolidate this social learning by participating in a project in which he held a high level of interest. During this second project, “Things on wheels,” Michael’s development as a ‘ready, willing and able’ learner clearly came into view. The knowledge teachers had gained about Michael during the first project contributed to the way they acknowledged his transformation during the second project. In the first project he was seen to make the first tentative steps in participating in a group project with support from his family. In the second he became a key player in the project; his enthusiasm influenced the direction of this project.

Teachers have individual non-contact time to complete learning story documentation. They also meet together weekly as a group to reflect on the project journey and make plans for future experiences that could support and extend learning. During one of these meetings the three teachers involved in the ‘Things on wheels’ project with the children reflected together on Michael’s transformation. Their insights were documented using the frame of the three lenses, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural/institutional, as a teaching and learning story to share with his family.
Michael's learning story (2)
Written by Debbie - September 04

The intrapersonal lens: Michael’s participation
Over the last few weeks Michael has brought in something new to do with wheels almost every day! One particular day he brought in his very special cars from home. Dad wasn’t too sure about whether Michael should bring them in, but Michael’s mum, Corrina, reassured him that they would be safe on the top of the lockers until group time. Michael was so proud that day! Since then Michael has brought in a variety of items that relate to the ‘wheels’ project, they have come in different forms.

We’ve had photos of Michael’s Uncle Mike’s and Shane’s many cars, cars that race and cars that make a lot of noise! We’ve had amazing photos of Michael’s Dad’s truck with Michael driving the truck (well sitting in the drivers seat anyway). We’ve had skateboards, dump-trucks, and more racing cars! Every time Michael brings something new in, he contributes more to the discussion and reveals more knowledge about trucks and things with wheels!

The Interpersonal lens: Relationships that supported Michael’s learning
We believe that a key person supporting Michael’s learning is his mum Corrina. Ever since I first discussed with her the possibility of this as a project focus due to the interest that I know Michael already had, she has been supportive of Michael’s interest 100%. Every time that Michael brings something new Corrina gives the background information of the item. Like the fact that he uses the dump truck to pick up and dump the garden weeds!

Every time Corrina gives the teachers this background information, it allows us to remind Michael of this information, and tell the rest of the group. Michael’s Dad also plays a big part in his learning experiences as he takes Michael for rides in his big work truck, and puts Michael on his knee to ‘drive’ the truck through Eastgate car park! Michael’s extended family i.e. uncle Mike and Shane, also play a part in Michael’s learning experiences as Michael brings in photos of their cars, and times that they have raced at Woodford Glen Raceway. The children and teachers of the older learning group support, and are also supported by, Michael’s learning. More and more children are contributing items from home that relate to the ‘wheels’ interest, and I am sure that this is due to Michael’s huge interest and passion he shows for ‘anything with wheels’.
The cultural institutional lens: Centre practices that supported Michael’s learning

- Daily group time – Michael can anticipate a time in the day when he knows his voice is heard, his contribution is acknowledged.
- ‘Bringing items from home’ - Michael’s interest in the project is ‘visible’, and makes connecting links with home and centre.
- Recording group time - Michael’s conversation is documented, allowing teachers to reflect on his learning at a later date.
- Same three teachers - Michael has relationships with people who know him well. His learning is followed in detail through learning story documentation, and conversations between teachers and with Corrina.
- Corrina’s participation - Michael is supported to build on the familiar and to make sense of the unfamiliar. Michael gained familiarity with project work practices through the support of his family and began to confidently participate. Ongoing conversations with Corrina supported teachers to gain contextual knowledge to support their work with Michael.
- Learning and teaching stories - Documenting Michael’s learning allows for Michael’s family to have an understanding of what his learning looks like when he’s at the centre

The importance of stories about Michael's learning

Michael’s story became a significant example for teachers of how the learning community functions. It resonated in a number of ways with other continuous stories teachers had been collecting about individual children. The use of the three lenses of analysis provided teachers with a tool that enabled them to identify the interrelationship between their practices and the outcomes of the experience for individual members of the community. Use of the cultural institutional lens contributed particularly clearly to teachers acknowledging how their practices respond to individual children’s participation. Previously this had not been recognised. Through Michael’s story teachers were able to see how the individual is supported to engage in learning, and how individual participation (i.e. Michael and his family) contributes not only to their own learning but also to the learning of the social group.

Project work practices had evolved over time, often in response to the needs of a particular project at the time, and had become part of the way things are done here to support community participation in projects. Teachers identified how the practices established in the centre had created
a ‘project work culture’ characterised by the regular time of the day when children and adults come together to discuss the project, documentation that both informs and invites parental participation and the regular expectation for children to bring things from home to share and talk about.

**Documentation as a pathway to parental participation**

Michael’s story provided clear examples of how ‘project work’ documentation acts as a tool through which parent expertise and interest is called on. Parental interest is captured more strongly when it has particular relevance to parents’ own experiences. Some parents become key participants in the course of a project where they were being viewed as an ‘expert’. In the example above, both Michael’s parents joined in. As a result of authentic parental participation they saw themselves, and were viewed by the teachers, as major contributors to all children’s learning. Further data also showed that those parents who can be identified as key participants during a project often continue their centre participation in other ways beyond the focus of project-work. An example of this was that over the period of two projects, two ‘expert’ parents subsequently joined the centre management committee.

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**The awakening of teacher identity: Learning through visual art development**

Two art teachers were employed during the course of this research project and provided the teacher researcher team the opportunity to explore the notion of identity in relation to the vision they held for the art teacher’s role in the centre. The research team was aware that within a learning community the art teacher would be influential on the way things would be done in the centre as well as to the ways other participate. The research team was concerned not with the individual person with but with the approach each art teacher adopted. As visual art began to take shape in the centre teachers began questioning pedagogical approaches to visual art. An art teacher whose time was given solely to facilitating, planning and documenting visual art teaching and learning offered teachers a mirror through which to view and think about their own practice and beliefs.
The story of developing the visual arts

The first art teacher

The first art teacher employed by the centre brought to his role a strong belief in the competence of the child, and creativity flourished. At the end of the first six months with an artist on the team, the centre mounted an exhibition of their artwork for the Christmas party. Parents came and admired it; all the adults were very proud of the children’s work - it was great to see it valued. This value was especially evident in the way the artwork was displayed beautifully at the centre. The art teacher had offered opportunities for the children to experience ‘paint’ as a true medium for expression. As the children’s work was also displayed at the local mall, children could communicate to friends and family their love for this expressive medium. It became evident that art was becoming a form of communication within the early childhood setting. Some of the art teacher’s practices led to discussions at staff meetings. Children’s art experiences had become viewed as a separate component of the curriculum. The art teacher’s lack of prior knowledge about the early childhood curriculum was making it difficult for him to grasp the holistic nature of children’s learning and also the importance of centre home relationships. The teachers discussed possible links between the visual arts programme and Te Whāriki. The influence of these early discussions will become evident in a later section of this chapter where a visual arts framework with strong links to Te Whāriki is presented.

Due to professional and family commitments, the first art teacher was unable to continue at the centre, and resigned. At first, the centre was unsure whether to continue their art programme in the same way, with a new teacher. The teachers and management used the occasion of employing a new art teacher as an opportunity for evaluation. Could this departure become a catalyst for change?

The second art teacher

It was very evident at the interview stage that the new art teacher had a personal love of art and creativity. She had always been involved with visual arts, whether it be with her own children when they were young, i.e. the setting up of an art corner for them at home or her attendance at children’s camps providing the art programme, her work in early childhood centres, or her own attendance at art classes as her continued personal/professional development. In a recent reflection she stated her philosophy as:
...Through art/creativity you gain the knowledge, skills and ability to be able to relate to the world around you... In every person there is creativity – it is our gift within. No one needs to be the same or do things the same way. Teachers have differing prior experiences and knowledge to draw from... (September 2005)

Following the employment of this art teacher it took time to define her role within the programme. Under her influence, visual art took shape in the centre, and, through on-going explorations of the teaching team, became influential on the practice of individual teachers. This art teacher made contributions to the regular research meetings and practical art workshops. Her beliefs, practice and image of the competent child are combined in the way she describes the main characteristics of her approach to visual art provision:

- Respect for children’s work
- The provision for uninterrupted space and time
- Safe spaces in which to socialise and appreciate others’ work
- Children display their confidence through guiding others
- Children build up a large skill base through participating in a wide range of experiences
- These skills can be taken into all other areas of learning within and beyond the centre
- Time to watch and learn from others is a valuable part of the learning process
- Use of ‘real’ media and resources contribute to a sense of pride and respect
- Early childhood is not a practice run for learning.

The art teacher has no hesitation in saying that she has (and models) certain rules in the art room that children know they should follow, including respect for each other’s artwork. She makes it quite clear that she is not happy if a child paints somebody else’s artwork while the child is doing it. She says that children can work together on a piece of work but if someone is working on their own and their work is interfered with then she will discuss with the interfering child how she would have felt if someone had marked or damaged their work. Children can choose to work together, or choose to work on their own – this is their choice. She says that the room is not quiet all the time, but she expects a certain level of calmness to prevail.

The community of learners approach embedded in the centre philosophy is also evident within the philosophy of our second art teacher in the way she views expertise as not just being held by the adults. Children can also have expert knowledge in areas where some
adults do not. For example: the art teacher had taught the children over a number of different sessions the technique involved in ‘felting’. When a visiting student teacher showed interest in this process, it was a child who confidently showed her what to do:

The children have built up a large skill base and are able to work with many different resources. One 3 year-old child confidently showed (guided) a trainee teacher through all the stages of wool felting. The trainee teacher was most impressed with her skills. What the children are gaining are skills that can be taken into the community, with the confidence to use them, experiment and try new ideas not just with visual arts but with many situations in life. (September 2005)

The art teacher described another experience where she was teaching the children to use Indian ink. She explained that just because the children are small doesn’t mean that they should not use equipment that is real and authentic.

...So many times you see people just say - oh it doesn’t matter, they’re only little it doesn’t matter! I’m very fussy about it being presented well for them... for them to be able to get the results that are pleasing to them...

It was becoming evident with the visual art approach advocated by the second art teacher that she believed in the ‘competent artist’, whether it be adult or child.

**Exploring the difference between the art approaches**

As mentioned above, the resignation of the first art teacher created a ‘provocation’ for teachers and parent board members to re-visit the purpose and role of the art teacher in the centre. In line with regular practice in the centre, the teachers read some relevant articles to investigate the topic and then discussed the ideas generated. A paper by Visser (2003) threw into relief the progression of paradigms in visual arts at New Beginnings Pre-school. They recognised they had demonstrated three paradigms in action:

1. **The Child study paradigm**

Prior to the employment of an art teacher, art resources were displayed on table-tops, and paints were replenished at the easels. If children asked for resources they were either given them, or shown where to get them from. The role of the teacher was to stay slightly removed from the child’s visual art experience. It was believed at the time that the influence of the teacher would be detrimental to the child’s visual art experience. Teachers were not to ask anything about the child’s work, as this might put an ‘adult influence’ on children’s visual art work. This was interpreted as

The child study paradigm: believe that art development happens in stages, and offer experiences perceived to be developmentally appropriate.
The progressive education paradigm

The centre then decided to employ what they thought was an ‘art expert’ to introduce their expertise and passion to the children. The plan was to provide children with the medium of art (and other visual mediums) as a means of expressive communication. We found that not all children were attracted to this ‘visual experience’, but those who were became encouraged to use visual art as a language. These children used art as a means of communication with the art teacher, with each other, and with their families. The first teacher had a lot of art experience but no early childhood teaching experience; this meant that he lacked understanding of the holistic learning of young children. This led us to interpret the second paradigm as:

The progressive education paradigm: believe in creative self expression; accept individual differences in creative endeavours with free access to a range of art media.

Co-learning paradigm

With the employment of the second art teacher it was evident that the teachers knew much more about what they did and didn’t want as features of the art programme. The teachers wanted to change to a paradigm where the art programme was inclusive of all age groups in the centre, integrated into the curriculum, implemented by all teachers (not solely by the art teacher), and based on sound relationships among the art teacher and parents, teachers and children. This third paradigm was interpreted as:

Co-learning by children and adults: underpinned by the belief that engaging in art experiences is a cognitive “activity of the mind, of relationships, as well as feelings” (Visser, 2003, p.1).

Identity of teachers as co-learners

The concept of a co-learner identity initially emerged during a cycle of research undertaken by three teachers. These teachers held responsibility for project work with the older group of children. Their current project was called ‘above and below the sea’ and involved representing understandings and knowledge through the use of visual art tools and media. Together children and teachers were creating a large pictorial representation on a canvas. The children and teachers came together for a daily group time to participate in discussions and investigations of the project focus. The teachers had developed an interest in exploring how these group times supported co-learning.

Research process 2.2: Reflective writing around the idea of co-learning

Teachers began their research by recording their current understandings of co-learning based on the following questions:

- What does co-learning look like in the group time?
- What does co-learning look like specifically for the children?
- What does co-learning look like between the teachers and the children?
- What does co-learning look like among the teachers?

Following this reflective process teachers videoed a selection of three different group time sessions. The video footage was later viewed by the teachers and research associate to compare it with initial ideas, to identify discrepancies or new understandings and to discover what conditions enable co-learning to occur.
Are we who we think we are?

One segment of the video footage became significant in contributing to teachers’ understandings about co-learning. The episode was a group time involving ten children and three teachers. The activity included introducing children to their first artwork on canvas, experimenting with collage ideas and sharing things from home.

Teachers identified ‘ways of being’ for teachers and children based on the video footage. They identified three approaches to teaching: where the teacher initiates and leads the conversation, where the interactions are shared, and where the child initiates the conversation. These approaches are summarised in exhibit 2.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of being – teacher</th>
<th>Ways of being – child</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher initiated and led</strong></td>
<td><strong>Child initiated and led</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(presenting the canvas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information giving</td>
<td>Sitting, listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing discussion</td>
<td>Taking responsibility for own participation, responding appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning – what do you like about the…?</td>
<td>Taking turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting, listening</td>
<td>Asking teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive – shared role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Child initiated and led</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(collage work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding – actively participating</td>
<td>Listening to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning – I wonder what’s happened, do you think…, what do you think that might be, can you see that, what do you think is happening in that?</td>
<td>Scaffolding – building on children’s conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing ideas/theorizing – you think it could be a white….maybe, or it could be …</td>
<td>Questioning children’s ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and responding</td>
<td>Offer questions, asking for support/help, sharing ideas – I think it’s Bruce, someone eats penguins, sharks eat fishy and duckies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing ideas &amp; knowledge</td>
<td>Recognizing their achievements – I made a spiral, hey it’s the same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Co-learning and visual art teaching styles

What became apparent in the data were differences in teaching styles and in how these styles directly influence children’s participation. Teachers began to recognize that one particular style restricted children as co-learners. Children had revealed themselves as capable and competent co-learners; however, when the teacher role became more directive, children took a more passive role. This was challenging to the teachers and left them uncomfortable about their identity. The
particular image presented on the video was in conflict with the teaching team’s vision of a community of learners in action. Discussion and debate among the teachers was shared with the whole teaching team. The question “are we who we think we are?” was clearly raised.

The exhibit 2.5 is a photograph of the canvas completed during the ‘above and below the sea’ project. Teachers viewed the contrast between the bottom and top half of the image as representational of the shifts they made in their practice as a result of this exploration. The orderliness of the bottom section represented a time when teacher initiated practice dominated whereas the top section (above the sea) was completed when teachers moved towards using a more interactive co-learning approach with children. Children’s ideas and creativity are more evident.

![Exhibit 2.5 Above and below the sea](image)

Participation as researchers of their own practices had a powerful effect in changing teacher expectations and understanding about teaching and learning. The effects of teachers changing their practice in children’s learning became apparent on the canvas. This event engaged teachers in
continued discussion as they reflected on their experience; it challenged views about approaches to visual art teaching and learning. As these were discussed the differing perspectives teachers held became evident. As a team they were provoked to further explore visual art teaching and learning in an attempt to understand the dilemma that had arisen: “Is there a right way to teach visual art?”

**Is there a right way to teach visual art?**

Teachers came from differing backgrounds and had gained their qualifications from different providers so that establishing a culture within this centre for implementing visual art demanded they engage in reflective discussion about their vision for this in the centre. While team discussions resulted in a clearly articulated vision and expectations, collective practice based on this did not always result. Staff changes during the first eighteen months of the research project meant that continuity of group understandings did not occur. The majority of teachers participating in the final eighteen months of the research had not been involved in the initial phase of the research. As new teachers came on board they inherited the team vision to establish visual art as an integrated part of the curriculum for children and became actively involved in developing practices to achieve this. Through team discussions, teachers found they shared a common unease. They did not all feel very confident in working with children in this learning domain. A range of ability and expertise in visual art within the team was evident, with some teachers acknowledging they had a real passion in this area while others indicated they felt less able and ill-equipped.

**Fear of doing the wrong thing**

In general, teachers felt their training and preparation for teaching had not provided them with a sound understanding of teaching and learning in visual art from a socio-cultural perspective. They struggled with prior ‘messages’ such as ‘too much interference in children’s creative experiences can be damaging for the child’ that seemed to be in direct conflict with their current understandings of how important teacher/child interactions are in the learning process. While they were able to embrace socio-cultural constructivist views on teaching and learning in other areas of their work, such acceptance was proving problematic in the area of visual art. As a result, some teachers admitted to avoiding participation in visual art with children through fear that they might ‘do the wrong thing’. Perhaps non-participation would have been acceptable if the art teacher had been viewed as providing the expertise necessary for the centre’s programme; however, the vision of the team was to establish visual art as an integrated part of the curriculum for children. To achieve this the teaching team acknowledged that all teachers needed to be active participants in visual art experiences with children.
The research exploration involved teachers critiquing knowledge and understandings on a personal level and then revealing insights of themselves to their colleagues. The process resulted in teachers gaining a sense of individual identity as they developed an understanding of themselves in relation to their colleagues. It became apparent that when individual teacher identity in relation to this curriculum area was acknowledged, the collective practice of the team was strengthened.

**Research process 2.3: Collective investigation within a community of practice - visual art**

This phase of the research involved teachers coming together to explore their practices in more depth, much like the way in which Wenger et al. (1998) describe a community of practice:

“Groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

Teachers acknowledged that they wanted to improve their knowledge and understandings about teaching and learning practices in visual art. This provided them with a common purpose and a defined ‘domain’ to engage with. Wenger (2005) explains that a community of practice has three key fundamental characteristics – a social system and set of relationships (community), a domain (area of knowledge) and a focus on practice. These elements were clearly evident in this research cycle.

The research design involved three different areas of activity over an eight-month period that contributed to a phase of analysis and interpretation. The teacher/researcher team was interested in how teachers co-constructed visual art in the curriculum, what knowledge and understandings developed and how this impacted on practice.

The activities and approaches used to gather data were:

1. Teachers documented a sequence of two individual reflections. The first was written prior to engaging in further research activity and described past influences and views that teachers felt had had an impact on their view of themselves in relation to visual art. The second followed participation in art workshops and team discussions. It focused on how teachers viewed their personal development as teachers of art, how their beliefs and knowledge had changed and what experiences had contributed to this. The key points in individual reflections were summarized and represented in a chart to the team for further reflection.

2. Teachers participated in a series of art workshops to experience ‘being an artist.’ Two teachers had recently attended a national art conference and made the suggestion of participating in art workshops where teachers could experience visual art as learners themselves. They had also been introduced to the concept of ‘art as a narrative’ and saw this as an opportunity to explore this concept as a team, based on their own experience. Teachers viewed their participation as a way to develop their own abilities in visual art. Team meetings followed each workshop and involved teachers in reflection and analysis of each experience. Each discussion was tape-recorded.

3. Finally, visual art teaching and learning stories (Carr, 1998) collected over the course of a year (127 in total) were gathered together and collated according to authorship. Each teacher’s collection of learning and teaching stories was available as data to reflect on, alongside their personal recollections of prior influences and experiences, in support of their second reflective writing.

Data from teachers’ individual reflections was re-presented in table form by the research associate. The first column, ‘prior view/experiences’, drew on data from the teachers’ first reflective writing. A framework of questions had been distributed to teachers to guide their second reflective writing process. Analysis of this data involved drawing out the key words, phrases and ideas each teacher had documented. Presenting this information as a table provided teachers with easy access to each teacher’s journey of learning. The table was distributed to the team prior to a teacher researcher meeting at which time teachers questioned and clarified the detail with each other.

**Developing teacher confidence**

The framework displayed in appendix 1 (pages 190-92) developed as a result of individual teacher reflection: the analysis of these data contributed to teachers clarifying their understandings of,
Indeed, acknowledging and valuing, their individual identities. The majority of teachers acknowledged they had increased confidence in working with children in visual art; there was a general sense of teachers feeling more interested and willing to participate. The view of visual art as a social activity during which teachers and children can engage in reciprocal relationships was strongly evident as an emerging or consolidated belief of teachers.

Differing experiences were contributing factors to individual teacher learning. There was no set recipe for all. Teacher learning was an interplay of experience, relationships and reflection. Participating in art experiences was identified as a major contributor to teacher learning; however, as the data suggests, it would not have been effective in isolation. It is interesting to note that teachers referred to participating as involving both children and adults. There was some recognition here that participating with children was a valuable source of learning; children as teachers? Teachers discussed their learning from an individual perspective. The process had allowed individuals to explore personal views and participation; however, the outcome from exploring individual pathways was one of collective strength.

When this framework was shared within the teaching team, teachers commented on how they were learning about each other in a way that they had not done previously. Presenting the data in a table format made ‘shifts’ in thinking, understanding and practice of individuals explicit to the team. Personal learning was overtly shared. Teachers had made explicit how previous practice in the centre had been influenced by individuals’ prior knowledge and experiences, and how they viewed themselves in relation to ‘being an artist’. In summary, individuals’ pasts affected participation in art. Acknowledgement of this meant teachers acquired a more positive view of themselves as learners in this domain. Alongside this teachers developed personal connections with colleagues that contributed to improvements in the way the team worked together. This was described in terms of respect for and tolerance of difference and diversity, and recognition and value of individual expertise.

**Adopting a considered approach – space, time and relationships**

Learning about being an ‘artist’ and art teacher created an awareness that individuals need not strive to be the same. Initial inquiries may have been motivated by a need to discover the ‘right’ way to engage with young children in visual art, but an outcome of the action research has been recognition that participating in a ‘considered’ way is more valuable than seeking a ‘right’ way. Visual art encourages individuality where individual approach and expression is valued. A considered approach to implementing visual art experiences involves practices embedded in respectful
relationships. The factors teachers identified as necessary to consider are: promoting a positive self image, sense of satisfaction and achievement, value of and respect for others’ work, appreciation of aesthetics and beauty, and promoting a sense of self as competent and capable.

As a next step, teachers moved from their own learning experiences to what it might mean for children as learners in the centre. Three areas of the programme were identified as needing consideration: space, time and relationships. Space to spread out or to be alone had been particularly valued during workshops. Teachers considered the layout of the art room and whether other areas of the environment could be utilized. Time to pursue ideas and engage in the activity of art was seen to be particularly important. Teachers began considering how they could make more time available for children by changing existing routines: for example, a whole group kai time could become a rolling time.

Relationships provided the biggest challenge for teachers. They acknowledged that genuine, respectful, and responsive interactions during teacher workshops had a profound impact on how participants came to view themselves. They questioned the negative impact overuse of common phrases with children could have. Phrases such as “I like the way you do …” or “would you like to tell me about …” can lose their genuineness. Interactions among adults had been predominantly about giving valued feedback, insightful ideas, seeking opinion, and acceptance. Teachers had also become aware of how in their own learning experiences they tended to seek out relationships with others with whom they felt they had an affinity, those who knew them well and in whom they had confidence. They also discussed how overuse of praise could have an effect opposite to that intended, in that children become motivated to receive generalized personal recognition from the adult rather than recognition for their achievements, work and thinking. At a follow-up meeting with the research associate, a month later, the teacher researcher team reflected on changes that had occurred in the centre programme as a result of their investigations. Teacher participation was acknowledged as the most significant area of difference. The research process had enabled teachers to move their practice from an intuitive level to one that is informed and thought about, as evident in appendix 1 (pages 190-92).
Findings 2.1: Shifts in participation by teachers

Some of the shifts in teacher participation that occurred in the centre included:

- Teachers working collectively and sharing enthusiasm to work with children
- All teachers participating in art experiences with children
- The art teacher’s expertise and support began to be utilized more by others
- Teachers drew on each other’s strengths and interests – guidance from others was actively sought
- Teachers continually reflected and questioned themselves; there was an increased awareness of how the teacher role and interactions may influence children
- Teachers thought more deeply about what art experiences they want to offer children, both inside and outside the centre, and why they want to offer these
- Teachers made environmental changes to provide more unrestricted access to art space and resources and provision for continued experiences
- Kai routine changed to become a rolling time, allowing children uninterrupted time for their artwork
- The level of respect for children’s work increased by ensuring up-to-date work was displayed and individual children’s art folders were introduced
- Teachers began observing, discussing and documenting children’s collaborative and continuous ventures in art more, rather than individual one-off snapshot stories.

Sarah’s story: coming to know self and others

Sarah’s story is an example of how one teacher came to gain a greater understanding of her own dual identities as a learner and as one who guides learning through her interactions. A similar understanding of the dual identities of children also emerged. Sarah initially held an identity as one who ‘felt hopeless’ in the area of visual art. She talked of how she avoided participating with children in art because she felt she had limited ability to offer. Her research journey was motivated by the team’s previous exploration through which some of her prior views were challenged. For Sarah, the issue of children copying others was confusing. The detail in her story is important because it shows how the alternation between writing about events and the consideration of
implications and possible interpretation of those events allowed her to gain insight into an issue that concerned her.

Research process 2.4: Data gathering, discussion and story telling

Sarah collected the following data over a two-month timeframe during her regular participation in the centre programme:

- episodes of children involved in copying documented in her reflective journal
- photographs to support the journal entries and learning stories
- learning and teaching stories that she considered relevant.

The data was collated and discussed with the research associate at two meetings. Emerging implications and understandings were documented as further data.

At the final meeting with the research associate all data was collated and analyzed. Understandings were gained by analyzing and interpreting across and among data. A series of journal entries and learning stories were selected to illustrate the resulting learning.

Sarah then wrote an account of her journey and presented this at a Centre of Innovation hui, 29 – 30th Nov 05.

To copy or not?
Sarah’s story

Author Sarah, November 05

Introduction

Visual arts is one of the components our centre has been exploring through our involvement in the Centre Of Innovation research. All teachers have been actively researching this subject over the past 2 years with our research associate as an integral part of our journey. My involvement began when my colleague and I investigated how visual art can support younger children’s learning within project work. At that time we encountered many challenges to our perception of the teacher role. For me, it raised questions about many of my ideas and understandings of children’s learning in visual art.

As a whole team (8 teachers) we have regularly had meetings where we discussed our views on visual arts, what we felt should be the teachers’ role and we reviewed current visual art literature. We also engaged in visual art workshops together after hours at the centre. Through these workshops we were able to personally explore what engaging in visual arts felt like. We would then share with the group how we felt during the experience as well as about our final product. Our feelings were varied. Some teachers felt uncomfortable about their artistic abilities, while others were very comfortable. This helped us understand what children may sometimes feel when creating work. We all felt strongly that visual art was an important part of the curriculum and an important cultural tool. We were provoked to think about how we as adults showed children that art is a
valued tool of our culture. We could all answer this question in relation to cultural tools such as the written word as we model and use text in many ways with children. Why is art any different?

Through these numerous art explorations and discussions I decided to investigate an area that had niggled at me for some time - artistic copying. As a team we had made a commitment to engage more actively in visual art with and alongside children. We shared a belief that if children are to view art as something that is valued within the culture of the centre then adults need to be seen participating in art themselves. This created a dilemma for me. If we work alongside children using art media and techniques how do we avoid the pitfalls such as children receiving the message that adult art is the model? Together the research associate and I proposed the question, “Is copying a valid technique for learning?”

I already had some preconceived notions. I did not think that copying was a valid technique for learning. I felt it had negative connotations; it made me think of forgery and theft. Regardless I was eager to embark on this research journey and find some answers. I gained my first piece of research data with a child named Justice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sarah's Journal, 16/6/05 Working with Justice (1)</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| We got some paper and crayons and set them down on the floor (the art table was in use). I started to draw the vase and Justice immediately started to copy what I was doing. I said to her not to copy my picture, and just draw what she saw. I told her this was what I was doing. She looked a bit frustrated and was not confident. She said "Sarah I can’t draw it." I told her she could - it didn’t matter if it did not look exactly like what she had seen, just give it a go. She asked if I could at least draw the vase for her. I relented and drew the vase for her. I assured her that she could draw the flowers. She proceeded drawing the flowers (still looking at my picture and the vase). As she was drawing the flowers, at each flower she would ask me if it looked OK. I told that it was great and whatever she drew it would be fine as it was drawing what she saw. She looked at her picture and said it was not good enough.

Justice had always shown a strong interest and competency in art and was often found painting or drawing in the art room. She always had a large collection of paintings to take home every day. I thought working alongside with her would be a rewarding and positive experience for both of us. I envisioned us contently sitting beside each other concentrating on studying the vase of beautiful flowers and then interpreting what we each saw onto our papers. However, it was not an overly happy experience for either one of us. Even though there was a model, Justice felt compelled to copy me rather than the vase of flowers. She then compared her work with mine, and was not satisfied with her results. Through this comparison, she gained a negative view of her capabilities and her potential. I was distressed that she had ignored the model and concentrated on my sketch. It bothered me because I felt that copying my work impeded her unique creativity that she might have concluded that there was only one right way to draw flowers which was based solely on my interpretation. This also deeply worried me as I did not (and still don’t) categorize myself with having strong artistic ability. I compare my artistic abilities to those of a 12 or 13 year old. What if she always based her drawing of flowers on this immature model and never progressed to reach her potential? Penny Brownlee (1991) echoed my thoughts. She discusses how providing children with an adult picture will take away their chance to sort out ideas on how a particular object may look and draw it in a symbolic form. Additionally
I believed that I had inhibited Justice’s creativity and lowered her self-esteem. Justice in turn was frustrated and upset with herself.

A turning point in my research

Although I was initially disappointed with my first story documenting copying, I was not thwarted and continued to collect stories on children’s copying. I needed more stories to answer my proposed question. Rather than set up and “stage” incidents of copying (i.e. providing children with a model to draw from) I decided to observe children working together in their natural environment. I always had my notebook and camera handy if a copying situation arose. I took notice of children’s interactions together, and the language they used when documenting my stories.

Findings

Through collecting a range of stories I was able to compile several findings that I found significant. Firstly, when children copy each other, the process can foster a sense of belonging. Saffron was relatively new to the centre and I felt that through working alongside and following Brianna’s lead, Saffron developed a ‘connectedness’ with Brianna. There was a sense of acceptance between them. This story, along with others I had collected, also illustrated to me that children don’t mind being copied – they don’t have the need to secure ownership of their ideas.

Sarah’s Journal 21.7.05 - Copying Circles (2)

I was outside and the art easel was set up outside (it’s usually in the art room). Nobody was painting and I saw Brianna wasn’t currently engaged. She was walking past me when I asked her if she would like to do a painting. She answered that she would like to do a painting if I sat beside her. I agreed, and we both sat down on the wee chairs in front of the easel.

I was just painting lines, and Brianna was doing her own painting (swirls of different colours). While I was painting, Saffron approached me and said that she wanted to do a painting. I told her that I was nearly finished with my painting, and then she could have my seat. I quickly finished and relinquished my chair to her. Brianna then announced that she had finished her painting, and would like to do another one. I took off our paintings, and hung them on the wire to dry. I stood a few feet behind the girls, waiting to see what they would paint. Brianna started painting away. I watched as Saffron stared at what Brianna was painting, and then proceeded to copy the image onto her paper. Both of the children were painting circles. I noted that Saffron spent much of her time looking at what Brianna was doing.

Secondly, children can move seamlessly into the roles of copier and the one being copied as Brianna illustrates in the next story.
Sarah’s journal 19.7.05 - Moving between roles (3)

Emalee and Brianna were painting at the art easel together. After they had finished painting, Brianna followed Emalee to the round table. Emalee began to fold a piece of paper, and then tape each of the folded bits. I noticed Brianna watching her. Brianna then too got a plain piece of paper, and a tape dispenser, and sat beside Emalee. She too began to fold and tape each of the folds. Emalee announced that this was a present for her mum. Brianna then too said that she was making a present for her mum.

These two stories exemplify Brianna’s dual roles. In the first story she was the one who was being copied. In the second story she copied Emalee’s idea and process of making a present. In both situations Brianna participated confidently. There was no sense of unease. I noticed that Emalee also benefited from the experience as it was somehow cementing the friendship between the two girls. Emalee’s abilities were being recognised by Brianna and I wondered about the impact this had on Emalee’s view of herself. It appears that every child can gain benefits from engaging in either role.

The following collection of stories about Paris’ involvement in visual art experiences helped me to gain an understanding of how embedded copying is as a learning strategy children naturally use for different purposes.

Sarah’s Journal 19.7.05 - Copying as an embedded learning strategy (4)

Quinn found one of the plastic cotton reels and began to coat the top with glue. Paris was sitting beside him, and noticed what he was doing. She finished her dye painting, and went to retrieve one of the reels as well. She too coated the top with glue. Quinn began to stick various items on his reel (cotton, ice cream sticks, etc). Paris then too found some things to stick on hers. Crahsau was busily painting at the table, and he finished his painting, and followed the same process as the other two children. Denzel (child on the left) watched the other three children, but continued on his painting. Paris said she was finished, and left her reel. All of the other children soon said that they were finished as well and exited the art room after Paris.

This group of children borrowed ideas from each other while being totally engaged in exploring the media and resources for themselves. Again there was a sense of belonging apparent at the time which was in some way evident in the way they all decided to move on within a short time of each other. The next story sees Paris again in the position of wanting help with getting started. This time she is more formally involved in copying another child as Nina becomes the “teacher” who competently shows her the process.
All of the teachers have turns with having a week of afternoons in the art room. It was my rostered week so I was in the art room when Paris asked me to help her draw a butterfly. I asked what I could do to help her and she said “draw a butterfly”. I looked at what she had done so far on her paper. She had drawn the body of the butterfly so I remarked that she appeared to be nearly finished with her butterfly. She could indeed draw a butterfly. She told me that she couldn’t draw a butterfly. Nina was sitting nearby and had heard our conversation. She walked over to where Paris was and traced with her finger how to draw the outline of a butterfly on Paris’s paper. As Paris and I watched Nina trace the outline with her finger I remarked to Paris that Nina might be a good teacher of drawing butterflies. I asked Nina if she would like to show Paris the way that she draws butterflies. Nina nodded her head. She was quite excited at this prospect and quickly walked around the art room looking for something to draw with. I offered her a coloured pencil but she shook her head and took a marker instead. She then drew a butterfly directly on the collage that she was working on. Paris watched her intently and immediately copied her technique. Once Paris had finished drawing the butterfly she announced that she now had a butterfly puppet. Nina then began cutting out the objects she had drawn on her collage. Paris then got a pair of scissors and began to cut out her drawings.

It was obvious to me that Nina relished her role as teacher to Paris. She could barely contain her excitement as she hurried around the art room looking for the right pen to use to demonstrate to Paris her way of drawing butterflies. Interestingly, Nina adopted Paris’ idea of cutting the figures out at the end. Each had something to contribute so that it became a mutually benefiting relationship. This to me became an example of how, through social participation, children engage in co-constructing their ideas and skills. In the next story Paris again seeks assistance however this time I felt I now had a range of strategies that I could offer in support of Paris’ endeavours.

From a learning and teaching story documented by Sarah (6) (21.7.05)

Paris’ story about a foot

In the afternoon, I went into the art room to see what creations were occurring. Makayla was sitting at the round table by herself. I noticed she was busy cutting paper with scissors. I was soon joined by Paris. Paris looked at what Makayla was doing and said, “That looks like a foot, can you make one for me?” I told Paris that I could help her make a foot, or she could copy what Makayla was doing, or ask Makayla to show her how to make one. Makayla heard my suggestions and said, “No, I won’t show her”. Paris then responded with, “I can draw it then, and cut it out”. I watched Paris as she did this. Paris then told me a story about her “foot”.

Once upon a time there was a monster. He found a footprint and said “Ahhh, that’s my footprint.” He hoped in the rubbish bin since someone was coming. He got out of the
Putting identity into community

Chapter 2: “Who are we?” Individual identity

My strategies didn’t go as planned however I realised that by giving choices I had allowed Paris time to consider her own participation. Her initial idea to draw a foot was inspired by copying her interpretation of what Mikayla was doing. Perhaps in this instance if someone had provided the support or model Paris may not have proceeded to produce an image she felt proud of, nor script a creative story about it. On reflection I can see how I allowed Paris to make decisions on what her next step was to be. This enabled her to pursue her own agenda while I remained ready and willing to offer help as and when needed. I didn’t feel compelled to act on her initial request but rather waited to gauge the amount of involvement she needed from me. How fickle interacting with children in visual art is.

The last story about Paris describes her in a situation where she confidently participates with other children to produce a finished product that they are all proud of. It consolidates my view of how children co-construct their ideas through watching and interacting with others. Each person’s contribution is respected and valued – a learning community in action.

From a learning and teaching story documented by Sarah (7) (26.7.05)

A climate of collaboration

I was in the art room, when Lorraine (teacher) called me over to the under’s door. She was telling me about a crab that Reko had found on the under’s side. She explained how he had stepped on it, and was busy putting the crab back together like a jigsaw puzzle. She added that some other children came over to help him. She had even taken a couple photos to document this. Lorraine suggested to Reko and the other children (Paris and Quentin) that they could go into the art room and stick the crab pieces on a piece of paper. The children seemed to like this suggestion, and filed on out to the art room. I trailed after them, to add support if needed.

Paris got a piece of paper and they sat on either side of Reko. I sat opposite them – just watching their interactions. Paris and Quentin watched as Reko put glue on the paper, and stuck each of the crab remnants on the paper. After he was finished, the children studied the piece of paper. Quentin declared; “It needs decorations" and Paris said, "The crab needs something to look at" Quentin hopped off his chair and grabbed some magazines. He began to flip through them and carefully cut out the photos that appealed to him. Paris found some cellophane and began to cut this out as well. When Paris and Quentin had cut out a piece (ready to be stuck on) I noticed that they laid it on the paper. It was Reko’s job to glue it, and determine where it would be stuck. Paris turned to Reko and said, “This is your picture eh”? Reko nodded his head. I really enjoyed my time watching the interactions of Paris, Quentin, and Reko. There was a strong culture of respect between all of the children. They also showed great respect to the crushed crab. They carefully put it back together, and gave it brilliant decorations to look at. They each were able to contribute their ideas and they collaborated beautifully on their crab motif. Later in the day, Reko proudly showed his mum the completed crab collage. Great job everyone!!
Paris’ stories reinforce how valuable copying is as a learning strategy. Adopting the role of copier allows children to borrow ideas from each other to get started, try something new, learn a technique, or follow a process. In Paris’ first story, she got started by borrowing another child’s idea of using a reel to decorate and followed the process the other child used. She tried something new by copying the model from another child of how to draw a butterfly. She followed a process by collaborating with two other children in the art room to create a collage. Furthermore when collaborating with the other two children she offered her own suggestions and put in some hard work, even though it was determined that she would not “own” this piece of work. She was motivated by the other child’s satisfaction. The children’s stories taught me a lot about what my role could look like. They naturally use strategies that support, encourage and teach others. My confidence to work with visual art alongside children was growing.

The final story I will share is one that provoked further reflection for me. It has some features in common with the very first story about Justice, however the outcome is almost the opposite. Reflecting on this story has helped to address my initial concerns about how to avoid the pitfalls when children copy another. Connor’s story describes how he copied an idea and process from me, but the product was completely different. He created a picture that was significant and meaningful to him.

**From a learning and teaching story documented by Sarah (8) (28.7.05)**

**Faces!**

I was in the art room and there was nothing set up on the circular table. I put out an assortment of materials markers, glue, coloured paper, scissors, foam pieces, etc). A couple of children came into the art room and began to use the materials - all differently from each other. Connor then arrived, and sat down beside me. He got a piece of paper and began to draw on it. I was feeling a bit creative myself, and decided to join the children. I glued three round buttons and some Styrofoam on my paper. I then outlined it in marker, so it looked like a face. Connor watched what I was doing, and announced that he would like to make a face as well.

We discovered that I had used all of the round bits, so we got some down. Connor chose which of the colours he wanted to represent the eyes and nose. He diligently worked on his face and I watched him. Once he had finished gluing on the eyes, nose and mouth, he then used the same marker as me. Instead of drawing a face he drew circles around the eyes.

He looked at me smiling and declared that they were glasses. He pointed at his picture and told me that he had also drawn some ears. I said it was an awesome face, and asked him if I could take his photo with it. He agreed.

A familiar feature of Justice’s and Connor’s stories is that I was working with the art materials alongside the children. In both instances they copied what I was doing however on closer scrutiny I discovered a difference – one that has influenced my practice and strengthened my understandings. In Justice’s story, she offered the initial idea when she suggested “Let’s draw the flowers”. Connor used copying to borrow my idea and then adapted it to create his own outcome. He followed his own agenda. When I think about Justice I can now see that her initial idea was interpreted by me and that the direction we took...
was my idea. I had not closely ‘listened’ to her request, what did she mean by ‘let’s draw the flowers’? Perhaps she had a different approach in mind – what was her agenda? At that time my practice was heavily influenced by the understanding I held that children’s work should be their own and so I created the situation, and expectation, for Justice to do her thing separately from me. I feel that by us both drawing separately from the same model Justice felt a compulsion to copy my work. Her original idea might have been that we could do it together, and if we had engaged in co-construction the outcome may have been mutually beneficial.

What have I learnt?
I have discovered that ‘copy’ is not a four-letter word, it is a valid technique for learning. Copying is a natural way of learning. Howard Gardiner (1980) confirms this for me by describing how children naturally copy sources, models, photographs, other pieces of work or people, if they don’t have previous knowledge or schemas of how something looks or is done. My collection of stories illustrates for me how it is an approach to building a repertoire of visual art knowledge and ability.

Sarah’s Reflections (9) - A summary of her own learning

From Sarah's presentation to the Centre of Innovation Hui (29.11.05)

I have learnt that copying has several benefits for children whether the copier or those being copied.

- Being the “copied” gives children an opportunity to have their abilities recognised by others, it boosts their confidence and sense of achievement. Children are powerful teachers for other children.

- Copying and being copied contributes towards a sense of inclusion in and belonging to the group.

- The copier is a self-motivated learner who has learnt to use an effective learning strategy.

Copying is a central strategy to co-learning. It involves sharing ideas and ways of doing things in a manner that all children can participate. Children don’t need to rely on language to be able to engage in co-constructing knowledge and abilities.

Regarding the role of the teacher I feel that there is a definite place for teachers working with and alongside children within visual arts. Teachers can assist and guide children in the teaching of techniques, ideas and skills that they haven’t been introduced to. It’s necessary for children to copy these newly taught techniques to enhance and further their artistic development. The key is to really ‘listen’ to the child and follow their agenda, not impose your own.

I also feel that it is the teacher’s role to show a genuine interest in visual art. This can be best achieved by sitting alongside children to paint, draw, or work together. If children don’t experience an environment where art is used and valued by adults how do they gain an understanding of the important place art has in our culture? A danger is that they will come to view art as a child’s entertainment activity.

Personally I have grown enormously in my confidence and competence as a visual art teacher. It doesn’t matter about the level of my own ability – when co-constructing with children I am continually learning and this is exciting!
Discovering a common identity: Adults and children as teachers and learners

Following on from the process of individual learning in visual art the teacher researcher team began to analyze data collated from the collection of teaching and learning stories. The project director and research associate undertook initial data analysis using a process of word analysis. Two lists of descriptors were developed, one that described the children’s learning and participation and the other the teachers’. These were presented to the teacher researcher team to make sense of. Research interest was in discovering how the teacher and child were being presented through centre documentation. What image was being represented of teachers and learners in this community? Common themes or categories about children within the data were explored and refined by the teacher researcher team at two research meetings. Lively discussion and debate abounded as the team built up a collective image of the child as a teacher and learner in visual art.

Research process 2.5: Document analysis of learning stories

A form of document analysis was applied to the 127 learning and teaching stories to determine how children’s visual art learning was being described. Descriptors of the teacher role were also drawn from the data to provide insight into how teachers were constructing and describing their participation with children.

Analysis of the data continued as teachers focused on the second list, descriptors of teacher participation. In the learning and teaching stories, descriptors of the adult were predominantly about the teaching role; however, earlier research data had powerfully identified teachers as learners in this domain. It was a poignant moment when the teacher researcher team came to the realization that descriptors of children as teachers and learners matched those of the teacher; the descriptors of adults resonated with those of the children. The following exhibit presents some examples of the commonalities we found.
Exhibit 2.6: Commonalities in descriptors of children and adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trying things out, testing, experimenting</td>
<td>Trying out new things, excited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulates ideas, explains work or actions, describes their story about their art</td>
<td>Explaining the process, discussing problems, sharing their story about the product of their art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watches or listens to others, borrows ideas, learns from others</td>
<td>Observes, uses other peoples ideas, ask for help and critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continues over time, returns to and revisits prior use of media and techniques</td>
<td>Needing time to continue work, adding to original ideas, using new learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud, shares completed work with others, satisfied</td>
<td>Proud, sense of achievement, displays work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher researcher team came to understand that all participants (adults and children) share both the teaching and learning roles. They had, in fact, uncovered the identity of co-learners in the area of visual art.

**Te Whāriki and visual art teaching and learning**

To present these findings in an accessible way to the early childhood sector, the teacher researcher team drew on the strands and principles of Te Whāriki as a framework. A comfortable connection was made between the descriptors of identity as a visual art teacher and learner as defined by the research team and the strands of Te Whāriki. Exhibit 2.7 presents the resulting framework.
The identity of the learner and the teacher as co-learners in the learning domain of visual art.

Placing the principles and strands of Te Whāriki in the centre of the framework represents how the curriculum is viewed as central to visual art learning and teaching. The second circle lists those descriptors that emerged from the data that the research team considered illustrative of learning dispositions. The teacher researcher team made connections with Margaret Carr’s (Carr, 2001) learning and teaching story framework to categorize the dispositions alongside the strands.

Influence 2.5: Carr (2001) Learning dispositions within Te Whāriki

Use of a narrative learning and teaching story approach to assessment involves illustrating domains of learning dispositions in action. Carr (2001) has situated these domains alongside the strands of Te Whāriki, an indication that they are worthwhile outcomes for early childhood. The five domains of learning disposition as they connect to Te Whāriki are: taking an interest (Belonging); being involved (Wellbeing); persisting with difficulty and uncertainty (Exploration); communicating with others (Communication); and taking responsibility (Contribution).

Learning dispositions are described by Carr (2001) as ‘situated learning strategies plus motivation’. She goes on to describe them in terms of ‘being ready, willing and able’ to participate in various ways: a combination of inclination, sensitivity to occasion, and the relevant skill and knowledge” (p. 21).
Influence 2.6: Cowie and Carr (2004) Dispositions as actions

Cowie and Carr (2004) discuss how the concept of ‘dispositions’ has been ‘hard to pin down with the clarity that would be helpful to teachers’. They clarify the situation by suggesting that inclinations or dispositions are centrally associated with identity as a learner, social schema, and a possible self. Cowie and Carr suggest “there is merit in reading ‘disposition’ not as a noun, as a ‘thing’ to be acquired, but as a verb with qualifying adverbs” (p. 88). We have come to understand dispositions more in terms of actions rather than as a verb or a noun. In Cowie and Carr’s description of dispositions they remind us that valued attributes or dispositions will necessarily reflect a particular cultural perspective.

The image of the visual art learner and teacher

The dispositions we describe can be viewed as outcomes of this particular learning environment. The learning environment our teacher researcher team had been attempting to develop is one in which engaging in visual art experiences is a cognitive “activity of the mind, of relationships, as well as of feelings” (Visser, 2003, p. 1). The identity of learner teacher as described by the terms presented in the outer circle of the diagram resonates with this aspiration. This identity is applicable to both adults and children. Each of these terms is further supported by descriptions of observed actions or behaviours indicative of each domain of identity. See appendix 2 (p. 193) for the list of actions and behaviours.

Adults and children share a co-learner identity

Teachers gained confidence in their own dual identities as teachers and learners through exploring their approaches to implementing visual art in the curriculum. Developing an understanding of one’s own identity contributed to an acceptance and view of colleagues as capable and competent members of the teaching team. Prior assumptions and views teachers previously held of themselves became challenged as they individually developed:

- a belief in themselves as teachers and learners in visual art through gaining understandings of their past and present influences, who they are and how they came to be.
- acceptance of difference and diversity. It is not necessary to be the same or to do things in the same way – it’s OK to be different.
- an awareness of how valuing individual knowledge and expertise contributes to a person’s self-esteem and in turn encourages participation in the community
- an understanding of how individuals enter social relationships with unique interests, strengths and abilities. Through social interaction expertise is shared
- a belief that individual contribution enriches learning opportunities for the social group and nurtures community learning.
Teachers came to understand themselves as individuals as opposed to fitting the image they held about being a teacher within a team, or as a member of a group. Individual identity came to mean acceptance of self and others as both a learner and a teacher regardless of the role or label one has in the community. As a result, teacher participation in visual art with children increased and through these experiences the image of children and adults as co-learners who share similar characteristics was formed. Exhibit 2.8 offers an illustration of this view.

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**Exhibit 2.8: Further evolution – Participants as learners and teachers**

Teachers re-defined their view of teachers, parents and children as groups of participants to one that has less differentiation between the groups. All participants in New Beginnings Preschool community hold a position as competent and capable teachers and learners. The teaching and learning roles became entwined as teachers gained understanding of how one does not occur in isolation from the other. Teaching and learning occur through social interaction. The social context involves children and adults in negotiating meanings and understandings, individuals contribute to their own developing knowledge, skills and abilities, as well that of others. Participants within this learning community share the position of co-learners. As co-learners the identity of individuals is honoured, valued and respected.
Community learning

The concept of individual identity was not something that this research team set out to explore. Recognition of identity as an influential factor in the learning community emerged through the research processes. The image the teacher researcher team held of participants in the community shifted from one that viewed parents, children and teachers as different groups within the community to one which views all participants, children and adults, as co-learners. Individual identity came to mean acceptance of self and others as both a learner and teacher regardless of the role one has in the community. This view of individual identity nourishes a co-learning relationship.

The learning journey of the teacher researcher team challenged previously held assumptions and beliefs in the way children, teachers and parents had been defined as separate groups of community participants. The shift in view contributed to a more equitable relationship in teaching and learning ventures in the centre. Teachers discovered how the perception they hold of themselves and how they define others influences their practice, and in turn influences how people participate in their community. For example, as teachers recognised parents as individuals, practices changed to empower parents to contribute and participate through their own choice and in their own way. Another example is when teachers developed a view of themselves as learners in visual art they also strengthened their view of children as teachers. Teaching and learning became a shared venture where responsibility and expertise is shared. Adults were learning from children, children were learning from adults. In this relationship all participants are respected, valued and empowered in their dual identities: learners and teachers.

Early documentation of project work presented children, parents and teachers participating together within a group-learning context. Teachers discovered that individuals were not always visible in this form of documentation. With an increased awareness of how taking notice of and giving value to the individual contributes to a person’s identity, teachers looked to find ways that enabled them to discuss individual participation in project work without disconnecting the individual from the social context. Following use of a tool for analysis (Rogoff’s three lenses of analysis of socio-cultural activity, 2003) changes were made to the documentation of children’s learning experiences to enable the ‘social individual’ to come to the fore. The term ‘social individual’ was adopted as it reflected how teachers strengthened their view of the individual as one who, through social interaction, participates within the dual identities of teacher and learner. Changes to documentation
provided recognition of how individuals contribute to learning as well as how an individual’s changing participation is illustrative of learning.

Teacher learning in the area of visual art created an awareness that individuals need not strive to be the same. The art teacher’s approach to implementing visual art in the programme became influential on the practice of individual teachers. Visual art took shape in the centre alongside ongoing explorations about the teaching team’s beliefs and abilities in art. The process allowed individual teachers to explore personal views and participation; the outcome from exploring individual pathways was one of collective strength within the teaching team. Teachers concluded that participating in visual art with children in a ‘considered’ way is more valuable than seeking a ‘right’ way. A considered approach to implementing visual art experiences involves practices embedded in respectful relationships that honour the individual for who they are. In their interactions with children teachers seek to promote a positive self image; sense of satisfaction and achievement; value and respect for others’ work; appreciation of aesthetics and beauty; and enhancing a sense of self as competent and capable.

Teachers found it necessary to make changes within the programme to allow more space and time for children to engage with and pursue their art interests. For example, a rolling kai approach replaced a whole group kai time, the layout of the art room was redefined and further space made available in the main playroom, and more care and consideration was given to displaying art in the centre. These changes reflected the respect teachers developed for visual art in the community.

**Researcher learning**

Understandings of individual identities emerged in this study through the interplay of experience, personal and professional relationships, and reflective processes as supported by research activity. To understand how identity came to be acknowledged as central to this research, we can look at three significant aspects of the research method.

**Influences and supporting literature**

The research team acknowledged that, at times, theory informed and directly influenced practice in the centre. Research processes took on ideas and theoretical frameworks to support the teacher researcher team in their investigations. Theories that suited the research team’s needs were chosen to foster conversation and to find useful explanatory models, while at the same time the theories were not treated as ideologies to be followed slavishly. For example, Visser (2003) had provided
initial insight into underpinning beliefs of co-learning: “engaging in art experiences is a cognitive activity of the mind, of relationships, as well as feelings”. Teachers took on and adapted these understandings as they related them to their own experiences and practice. Discussing and interpreting differing perspectives influenced teacher practice and, as a result, practice became grounded in strengthened understandings.

**Research tools**

Standard tools of educational research underpinned our search for meaning. Data were gathered using surveys, and their contents analyzed: these yielded insights into what was going on in our early childhood environment. The strategy of summarizing raw data into a table enabled the teachers to gain insight into their personal differences. Alongside these, the routine practices of systematic documentation and fostering of reflective thinking provided triangulation to validate the teachers’ trustworthiness as researchers.

**Research Processes**

Teachers learnt through involvement in processes where they interacted with each other. Teacher learning related to interaction (Rogoff's interpersonal lens, see pgs. 57-58), experience in the learning environment (cultural/institutional) as well as personal reflection through journaling and writing learning stories (intrapersonal). New knowledge has been shaped by the teachers’ desire to understand their role from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective.

Processes were embedded in meaningful and relevant contexts. Participants involved themselves because the learning was of value to them individually as well as collectively. It enabled them to do things better. Research revealed how tacit knowledge had functioned powerfully in organising and maintaining practice. Through processes of personal and collective practice and reflection, the team confronted those assumptions and co-constructed new improved practices.